

Informational Essay

English I

Every person, real or fictional, possesses character traits or personality traits. These traits determine how a person thinks or feels about a particular topic, how a person acts, and how a person interacts with others. Sometimes a person possesses character traits that negatively affect the people around him/her, and sometimes those traits positively affect the people around him/her.

Choose ONE character from a novel or short story we have read in class, and write an essay on **2-3 character traits s/he possesses**. In that essay, use quotes to prove whether those character traits have a positive influence on other characters **OR** a negative influence on other characters.

NEW areas to pay close attention to:

- Arguable claim presented in the introduction
- Each paragraph begins with a well-written topic and concluding sentence
- Quotes are integrated into the body paragraphs and are properly cited with the author's name and page number

Areas to pay close attention to that were introduced on the Narrative Essay:

- Run-ons
- Commas as separators
- Spelling
- Word choice (vivid and grade-appropriate)
- Narrow focus
- Transitions
- MLA formatting

DUE DATES
Proposal: 11/2
First Draft: 11/15
Final Draft 12/2

Requirements:

1. Correct MLA formatting
2. 2-3 pages in length
3. Times New Roman, size 12 font
4. 3rd person only
5. No contractions
6. Use at least 1 semicolon correctly

Sam Worden

Mr. Worden

English I

25 November 2013

The Root of Evil

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is a depressing story. Men work and die, subsisting on meagre wages. Those who have the temerity to dream experience the greatest heartbreak when their dreams are crushed. The rest deaden themselves to the world, turning inward, mean, selfish. Although he may not have created this crushing system, the Boss clearly supports it, or at least does nothing to make the lives of those underneath him any better. He is a vain, suspicious man, who oppresses his workers for his own financial gain; because of these traits, it is clear that he is essentially a negative person with a negative impact on those around him.

When the boss is introduced, Steinbeck establishes him as vain in the first few sentences. In contrast to George and Lennie's travel-worn clothing, the boss is dressed up in "high heeled boots and spurs to prove he was not a laboring man" (Steinbeck 20). Steinbeck, who is notoriously closed-mouthed when it comes to explicit judgement of characters in the novel, shows his hand a little here. Not only is the boss dressed in nicer clothing than the workers, Steinbeck points out that those clothes are chosen specifically to put himself above the laboring man. The boss is actively trying to separate himself from the common man, as if to say "I am better than you."

Not only is the boss vain, but he also uses his suspicion to make people around him feel bad about themselves. During their initial interview, George is careful to do all the talking for

Lennie, fearing that if Lennie speaks he will say something bad and cause them to lose the job. The boss notices this and turns on George, saying, “why don’t you let him answer? What you trying to put over?” (Steinbeck 21). The boss grills George, certain that he is working some kind of scam. One might argue that the boss is simply reacting to the world around him, which contains plenty of shifty people. This may be true, but it should be the responsibility of a person in power to set an example for his employees. If the boss is suspicious of everyone, that suspicion will trickle down to the men.

The first two issues may be written off as largely superficial; after all, men in power want to stay in power, and a little vanity can probably be excused. However, the boss actively keeps his men poor, and this cannot be excused. George Milton’s dream is to buy a little place of his own someday. He even has the shack and land picked out. All he needs is four hundred and fifty dollars and he, Lennie, and Candy can leave the ranch and become masters of their own fate. “I bet we could swing her for that,” he says (Steinbeck 60). Those who have read the novel, though, know that this dream is not meant to be. At first it seems that their dreams are crushed because Lennie killed Curley’s wife, but that reading is too simplistic. In fact, there are many factors that stop George and Lennie from achieving their dream, not least of which is the miserable wage they receive at the ranch. The fifty dollars the boss pays out at the end of each month is simply not enough. That fifty dollars is just enough for one good night of partying, and the boss knows that most men will be so exhausted after a month of backbreaking labor that they will not have the willpower to save their money. They will go and blow it in one Saturday night and be back to work on Monday, slaving away to keep from starving. It is this existence that causes the men to lose their sense of empathy and indeed their very humanity. This is what keeps them isolated and

leads to Lennie's death.

Of course, the boss can not be blamed for the Great Depression. He too is doing his best to make it in the world, but unlike the other characters in *Of Mice and Men*, the boss is making his way by stepping on the heads of other men. He takes every opportunity to shove his superiority in their faces: he dresses differently, treats them with suspicious contempt, and pays them a pittance that forces them to stay in their positions of menial labor. While the boss is not the only problem, he is certainly not part of the solution, and as such must be regarded as an essentially negative person. Perhaps if he had gone a little further to help his men, George and Lennie would have gotten that little place and lived "offa the fatta the lan'."

Works Cited

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. New York. Penguin Books. 1993. Print